



May 17, 2012

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Honorable Bill Rosendahl, 11th Council District
City Hall
Room 415
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Recommendations for Amendments to the Westchester Community Design Overlay

Honorable City Councilman Rosendahl:

As we have discussed with you and your staff, Westchester property and business owners are encountering difficulties with the current Community Design Overlay (CDO), which we advocated. We all seem to agree that the construction of decorative trash enclosures and the installation of new side street windows should be able to be processed better than they have under the current CDO in the interests of all concerned. There are other problems that have arisen as well. The Westchester Town Center BID (WTC BID) is submitting this letter to suggest some amendments to the CDO, which should positively address these problems. While we continue to be supportive of the CDO goal of creating a “cohesive, pedestrian-friendly and vibrant commercial district,” improvements can and should be enacted.

We are pleased to be able to say that in the course of our extended review and consideration of the CDO that we have had discussions with Planning Department staff and there seems to be significant agreement in at least some of our proposals as outlined in the letter.

BACKGROUND

The WTC BID has held a series of meetings on the topic. We have met with your City Council Office staff, Planning Department staff, and local property and business owners. The clear feedback that we have received is that the length and cost of the CDO review process impedes the ability of local property and business owners to perform their necessary and on-going regular maintenance and leasing operations in a timely fashion. Even though Westchester is essentially fully developed, even relatively minor projects

require CDO review when similar projects would only require simple building permits in parts of the City not regulated by a CDO.

After conducting a number of meetings and seeking professional planning assistance, the WTC BID Board of Directors requests that the City Council Office initiate amendments to the Westchester CDO. The purpose of the amendments would be to add and/or revise language as necessary to the CDO to ensure that low-level development projects be processed with a building permit clearance within a quick, 2- to 3-week period from submittal to the Planning Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In particular, the WTC BID requests that the Council Office work to address the following:

- 1) Request that the City Council move for completion of the Planning Department's Proposed CDO Streamlining Ordinance of August 2010. We have attached information about that Ordinance. The proposed ordinance would allow for administrative review of projects when they are fully compliant with design guidelines and standards contained in Community Design Overlay Districts. Implementation of the ordinance would improve CDO review city-wide and further benefit Westchester property owners.
- 2) Direct the Planning Department to revise the Procedures for Director's Sign-off and Permit Clearances in CDO Section 2 to allow the following types of typical WTC CDO projects to be approved through the building permit clearance sign-off process:
 - Construction, repair, or addition to accessory structures;
 - Landscaping installations not associated with the construction of new structures;
 - Additions to existing structures less than 10,000 square feet;
 - Maintenance, repair, and striping or restriping of parking lots and parking buildings; and,

- Alterations, including structural repairs, or additions to any existing building or structure façade in which the aggregate value of the work, in any one 24-month period, is less than 50 percent of the building or structure's replacement value before the alterations or additions, as determined by the Department of Building and Safety.
- 3) Direct the Planning Department to clarify the directives of the CDO to ensure that this planning tool is used as a guideline and not a rigid set of standards. CDO Section 4 should be re-titled to Design Guidelines in lieu of Design Guidelines and Standards. The purpose is to ensure that the Guidelines are used as a tool to inform projects on the types of design measures that "should" be incorporated to achieve CDO compliance versus Guidelines that "shall" be incorporated by all projects. These distinctions are important in order to provide the Planning Department the ability to interpret the intent of the CDO on a case-by-case basis. If not, it leaves staff in a position of being forced to require standards for a project that may not make sense on an individual project basis. Allowing for a more flexible use of the CDO will ensure that successful and creative design solutions are achieved for the many unique and differing properties that comprise the Westchester area.

Councilman Rosendahl we look forward to working with your office and the City to adopt these recommendations.

Please let us know as we can assist in any way. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and the continued support and leadership you project on our behalf.

Sincerely,

Karen Dial
President

John Ruhlen
Secretary